

#02 Sazh Katzroy

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Final Fantasy XIII: Reminiscence -tracer of memories-

“When I think about it... I went through all that for Dajh’s sake.”

– Sazh Katzroy

An earsplitting roar comes from behind me. In a moment the thing has flown over my head, parting the white clouds and soaring far off into the sky.

This is an airfield on the city outskirts. It’s not an airport for passenger planes, it is used for chartered planes belonging to individuals and media companies, and emergency rescue planes.

There is a hangar with an open shutter. Inside, in the middle of a space large enough to fit a concert hall, a brand new airplane is parked. The silhouette of the fuselage is unfamiliar – the wings and body form a complex curve. It’s a new model craft still undergoing testing.

Standing there is my target. Perhaps preparing for his next flight, he is checking various areas on the body of the craft with a tool in one hand.

“Authorised personnel only, Miss,” he says, without even turning to me, continuing with his maintenance. He must have noticed the sound of my heels.

“It’s quite all right, I have a coverage permit.”

“Nice of them to go giving out permits,” he begins to grumble to himself, with an exaggerated sigh. “Even though this craft is a bundle of trade secrets. Ah well, ain’t my business if you’re a spy or something come to steal data on this here new model. I’m just the humble hired pilot. My job is flying the skies, spy management was not in my contract. Yo, Miss Spy, I’ll turn a blind eye if you like. If you get anything from selling the data, at least buy me a beer, yeah?”

Even as he makes these frivolous cracks, so light and unreserved, his hands don’t stop for a moment. The skill with which he moves through maintenance, swapping each tool for the next, looks like sleight of hand. According to what I found when I researched his personal history, he is remarkably skilled at flying, too, but I decide to pretend I don’t know and ask anyway.

“What a curious design this craft has. Can you really make it fly?”

"Yeah, this one flies, all right. She does look a little odd, I'll give you that, but she's got special features and then some. She follows my orders like a lamb, which makes her a real pleasure to fly." He pauses. "Well now, I did used to fly something more fun, a long time ago."

"I understand how you feel. Normal aeroplanes just don't satisfy you, do they? What you really want to fly isn't 'aircrafts', but 'airships', am I right?"

He snaps around to face me with enough force that his afro causes a gust of air.

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Sazh Katzroy."

His eyes are wide and round with shock. Even his nostrils are flared.

(2) Sazh Katzroy

I explain the details behind my data collection – that so far I have listened to many people, gathering testimonies regarding the mysterious memories. The strange coincidences in those memories which relate to a world that does not exist in reality. The hypothesis that we, humankind, once lived in this 'other world'. And how, since meeting Hope Estheim, I have come to believe in this hypothesis.

"I would like to hear what you have to say. Please, Mr. Katzroy."

He smiles, showing me white teeth. "Sazh is fine. Guess if Hope's referred you I can't say no. Okay then, where do I start..."

Just then, a cheerful voice echoes through the hangar. "Hey, daddy!"

Sazh's smile brightens as he notices the tiny boy running towards us, and he throws his arms out wide.

"Oof, what a strong attack! Even Daddy's no match for you," he says, laughing and hoisting the boy into his arms.

"What's up, did you come by yourself today?"

"Uh-uh, with the lady."

Sazh turns to me, muttering something like, *is that so*.

"This is my son, Dajh. Ain't he the spitting image of me?" He pets his son's matching hair with a faraway look in his eye. "When I think about it... I went through all that for Dajh's sake."

We could fight because we are human

Sazh invites me inside the aircraft. As the fuselage is still mid-testing there are experimental devices lined up inside, but there are also seats where we can sit and talk.

Dajh is in his own little world, playing pilot at the controls. He grips the joystick, corresponding with imaginary air traffic controllers over the radio.

Gazing at his son, who is fully enjoying his fantasy of flying the skies, Sazh begins to speak.

"Dajh was turned into a *I'Cie*, and there was nothing I could do but fight. Do you know what *I'Cie* are?"

"Beings bestowed with magic that humans don't have... They lead a cursed existence, feared by the people, right?"

"Yeah, pretty much. *I'Cie* come in two kinds. You can roughly divide them into *I'Cie* who are trying to destroy the

society we call Cocoon, and I'Cie who on the other hand are trying to protect society. But y'know, things ain't good for either of 'em. When you become a I'Cie that's it for you, you don't get to go back to your normal life. Even the protector I'Cie don't get treated like they're human. When Dajh became a I'Cie, he was just six years old. When it happened, well. It wasn't like we could just sit on our asses and cry."

"I have heard that the attempts made by Sanctum of Cocoon to kill innocent citizens were also due to background fear of I'Cie."

"Yeah, the Purge policy. I entered a Purge zone myself, helping Dajh after he got turned into a I'Cie. Meeting Lightning and the others there was the end of me. One thing led to another and I got tangled in something that ended up in me getting turned into a I'Cie myself. So then it was me and my son both, who would'a thought. We sure got the short straw..."

He speaks so casually of the difficult journey he had undergone. It seems like a painful past that anyone would rather not remember, but he peppers it with grumbling and jokes as though he is telling a funny story. I feel as though I now understand how this common pilot was able to survive such a cruel battle.

"No matter how heavy the reality is, you aren't crushed, you can keep laughing – I'm sure that, your composed heart, is your strength, Mr. Sazh."

"Stop it, you, I'm nowhere near that amazing. I can laugh now it's over, that's all. At the time I didn't have a shred of composure. I was especially terrible to Vanille, poor thing. When I found out it was her fault that Dajh got turned into a I'Cie, I lost my head at her. I was even gonna kill her. In the end I couldn't shoot her, though."

"I think both those things – wanting to kill someone, not being able to do it – are very human reactions."

"That's a scary thing to say... But I think you're right, really. We got turned into I'Cie, but we felt the stress because we are human, and we could fight because we are human. The fal'Cie who controlled the world were monsters, they were pretty much gods, and despite that we humans were the ones who won in the end."

In the Palace of Pleasure

"May I ask you about what happened after the ending of the age of the fal'Cie?"

"You most certainly may, but I don't really have anything worth saying. Didn't Hope tell you anything about what happened to me after that?"

"He said that after your journey, Mr. Sazh, you went missing for two years..."

"Yeah, me and Dajh both. We were swallowed up along with the airship we were in by a tear in space and time, and we came flying out into some mighty strange place. Serendipity, it was called. Do you know it?"

"No... This is the first time I've heard of it. Phrases along the lines of 'that world' have come up often during my data collection so far, but this is the first time I've heard the name Serendipity."

"Is that right. Well, I ain't surprised that it's so unknown, that place is kind of like another dimension, or maybe like having one foot in the realm of the dead."

"What did you do in such a place?"

"Gambling. I couldn't find Dajh, and got told that if I wanted to see him I oughta bet on the future. I was desperate, and I was not gonna mess around."

"Separated from your son, and all alone...."

"I wasn't alone, I had a fearsome ally. Someone who'd been with me since that first journey, a chocobo chick."

"A chocobo chick... was a fearsome ally?"

"Oh yeah, she was the best. She didn't help just me. I hear she gave Serah and Noel a whole lotta support on their travels, too."

A chocobo chick, helping people? I can't quite believe it, so I decide to put the topic aside for now.

Sazh's story has arrived at the year AF500. The year that the old Cocoon fell, and the artificial Cocoon was raised. The conclusion of the travels of Lightning's sister Serah, and Noel Kreiss.

The Torrent of Chaos

"I finally managed to get Dajh and we escaped Serendipity safe and sound, but something awful was happening to the world. The deluge of Chaos." Chaos—the name of the enormous energy that they say fills the realm of the dead. It is a dangerous force that brings ruin and destruction, but as it had been sealed inside the realm of the dead, they say it hadn't had much effect on the realm humanity resides in, until that point. "I heard about all this after the fact, but apparently the goddess Etro was the one who'd been holding the Chaos back. But then this piece of work called Caius Ballad tricked Serah and Noel, and destroyed the goddess Etro. With nothing to stop the Chaos, it came flooding into our world. And that started the age of destruction."

"Please allow me to ask about that period. Mr. Hope told me about events up to the year AF500. I don't know anything about what happened after the Chaos overflowed."

"...Well, it ain't a fun story." A heaviness has crept into Sazh's previously witty tone. "In the beginning, we had no idea how serious things actually were. I talked to Hope and Snow, Noel too, and we decided to go up against the Chaos. We thought if we worked together we could figure it out, we could weather this thing if we pushed ourselves one last time, something like that. My old ass aside, the youngsters were heroes, the lot of 'em. They had gone past the limits and pulled off miracles so many times before, we had a fire under us – if we stake our lives on it there's nothing we can do! I didn't just cheer 'em on, of course, I did what I could. I took down monsters that came from the Chaos regions more than once or twice. But, you know..." His words cut off. "I became useless," he forces out.

"Dajh went to sleep."

Dajh, asleep

He says there was no warning. One night Dajh went to sleep as usual, and the next morning he didn't wake up. He says that no matter how he called out or shook him, Dajh could not be wakened.

"I rushed to have a doctor look at him, but Dajh was the perfect picture of health. There was nothing physically wrong with him at all, but no matter what we did he wouldn't wake up, like only his soul was frozen. Comatose, cause unknown. Hope was so worried, he had the toppest of top doctors investigate, but nobody could figure anything out. I had too much going on in my head. I couldn't think about anything other than saving Dajh. I even stopped helping my friends with their work."

"That's... completely understandable. He's your irreplaceable son, after all."

"Before I knew it a year had gone by. Then two. Dajh kept sleeping, and I got more and more lost in my own head. 'I don't give a damn about the fight against the Chaos, If it'd help Dajh I'd even sell my soul to the Chaos'... That sort of thing."

"Did you become estranged from all your friends, too?"

"Nah, those guys took good care of me. It was around then Hope rose up as the leader of the people, and was trying to make a system to fight the Chaos. Snow and Noel were putting their lives on the line to fight and protect the people. They had those huge tasks on their shoulders, and even then they found so many moments in their busy lives to come see how we were doing and encourage me. Come on pops, don't give up, that sort of thing. I was so grateful. Too grateful to even... know how to handle it. Eventually I started to push them away."

"So much kindness was too heavy... perhaps."

"And they never once told me to act my age, you know. From then on I was pretty much a recluse. I went all around looking for a way to wake Dajh up, and when I couldn't I despaired, and when I couldn't take the despair I kept wandering... It was an endless cycle. I did that for years and years, and I lost all sense of time. It was sometime during that that Hope was 'spirited away'."

"Spirited away? Do you mean Mr. Hope went missing?"

"Apparently he left a certain message and suddenly vanished. I don't really know the details myself. I was so fixated on things with Dajh I wasn't paying attention to what was going on in the world... But I was aware that Hope getting spirited away marked the beginning of change in the world. It was around then that the teachings of the Order of Salvation began to spread. Vanille and Fang woke up, and a little girl named Lumina appeared. And then, finally, Lightning came back."

"The 'Saviour', right? It's a word I have heard many people say during my data collection so far."

"Oh-ho, you sure have done your research."

"However, I still do not know the fundamental details on this 'Saviour', such as what exactly they were. Everyone, myself included, has nothing but fragmentary recollections of it all. You people, however—" I can't hold back my question. It's weighed on me ever since I met Hope Estheim. "You and Mr. Hope and the others are special. You have clear memories of the things that took place in the 'other world'. But we are different. Only hazy, vague memories remain. What sort of people were we, when we were in that other world... We can't even remember our names. What is the difference? Were your memories so firmly engraved because you people, Mr. Sazh, fought so desperately, perhaps?"

"I wonder... Well, we did fight desperately, that's for sure, but there's no way we were the only ones. The citizens who got purged, the soldiers in the army, everyone was desperate."

"Then what is the difference, I wonder? Is it the power of a l'Cie?"

"Sorry, I don't really know myself. But, you know, your memories may be hazy now, but there might be something out there that could make you remember. Something that could answer for you what kind of person you were, I mean."

After the interview, I try asking him about Lightning and Snow's current whereabouts, but he replies that he doesn't know.

I don't know whether he truly doesn't know, or whether he does and is hiding it. There's also the possibility that he deemed my asking, stepping into the territory of their pasts and bringing up the memories of their painful struggle, too unpleasant. It seems that I will simply have to find them myself.

Suddenly, I sense someone coming in through the hatch of the aircraft.

Dajh, who was amusing himself playing at being a pilot, brightens like a switch has been flipped. "It's the lady!" He must have known by the footsteps.

"Yep!" yells a long-haired woman, giving a joking salute. "Ready for a break~? You were all just dying to see me,

weren't you?"

I can't really tell how old she is. She has a lively, youthful energy about her, but she also has a strangely grand presence.

"Dying to see you, my ass," Sazh grumbles, but the woman of unknown age doesn't pay any attention to him.

"Well now, Dajh, I bet you're getting hungry! Let's chart a course for dinner!"

"Roger that! All aboard!"

She leaves the craft with Dajh, playing around as they go.

Sazh sighs and looks at me, pulling a wry face, as though to say 'thank heavens'.

It seems his troubles never end. And, he seems happy. I get the feeling he was able to have some warmth shared with him.

I state my thanks for his help with my data collection, and just as I have parted ways with him and am about to head back, I am stopped by a shout.

Of course, it is the woman of unknown age. She gives me a wide, meaningful grin, takes my hand, and presses something into it.

"Uh... What's this?"

"Choco-boco-lina♪" She gives me a thumbs up and a flashy wink, as though that is any sort of answer.

I have no clue what she is on about. I find my eyes dropping to the object I've been given.

It's a small scrap of paper. Something has been written on it. An address, and what seems to be the name of a store. Perhaps it's some sort of restaurant somewhere?

"Um, is this...?"

I raise my head, and the woman is gone. There's only a cottony yellow feather, drifting gently in the air.

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